CONTENTS

Part Two: The Greek Cult and Myth

DIONYSOS

Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life

Part One The Cretan Prelude

I. MINOAN VISIONS

The Spirit of Minoan Art

ANYONE who enters the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion in Crete encounters an abundance of the purest elements of a great prelude: the prelude to the history of religion in Europe. For a time these treasures remained mute, for they were seen only as astonishing works of art. They bore witness to the rich life of a people who were endowed with high artistic gifts but whose writing no one could read. It was long believed that even if we were able to decipher the written characters, the language would still be incomprehensible. The one thing which students felt certain of was that the men who had created and maintained this art were not Greeks and that they were separated from the Greeks by a downfall similar to if not even more catastrophic than that which separated pagan Rome from the Christianized Latin and Germanic peoples.

It was assumed that the Cretans, like the Romans, had left a cultural heritage and that those who came after did not fail to make use of it. But apart from the visible and tangible works that came to light after 1900 when Sir Arthur Evans began his excavations at Knossos, everything that was said of these pre-Greeks—they were termed "Minoans" after the mythical king of Crete—was mere hypothesis, abstract and indemonstrable. The works, however, provided a highly characteristic over-all picture which would have been intelligible even without words and has more important things to tell us about the Minoans than the meager account of the texts that have since been deciphered.

An outstanding authority, Nikolaos Platon, a Cretan who spent the greater part of his life in daily contact with these objects, has characterized them and the people who created them as follows. The Minoans "created a civilization whose characteristics were the love of life and nature, and an art strongly imbued with charm and elegance. Their objects of art were miniatures, worked with care and love; they chose carefully the material which they used and succeeded in creating masterpieces with it. They had a special inclination towards the picturesque and to painting, and even their miniature plastic work is elaborated in styles derived from painting. Motion is its ruling characteristic; the figures move with lovely grace, the decorative designs whirl and turn, and even the architectural composition is allied to the incessant movement becoming multiform and complex. The art is ruled by conventions, and yet it looks equally naturalistic. The secret life of nature is outspread in man's creation, which imbues it with a special charm and grace. A hymn to Nature as a Goddess seems to be heard from everywhere, a hymn of joy and life."[1]

The wisdom of this account resides in the fact that it concentrates on the most characteristic factor and is not subject to the modifications in matters of detail that are always possible in archaeology.[2] Platon starts from a concrete, but at the same time spiritual, element that lends Minoan art a specific atmosphere which is to be found nowhere else and which differs from the atmosphere characteristic of Greek art after the Geometric style became prevalent. The word "life" occurs

1 N. Platon, *A Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Heraclion*, pp. 27 f.

2 "We are assisting today in the radical transformation of all theories, even of the principles themselves, of the exact sciences: how could archaeology, which is the youngest—and, let us say frankly, the least objective—among the sciences remain immovable and untouchable?" D. Levi, "The Italian Excavations in Crete and the Earliest European Civilisation," p. 10.

three times in the short passage I have quoted. The word used in the original Greek text would have to be *zoë*, which lends itself to juxtaposition with *physis*, "nature," in the sense of plant life. "Love of life and nature" suggests not only the common element in these works of art, but also their manifest content—a content which can find direct expression only in art and which is evident in all these objects, whatever their immediate purpose. In calling this manifest content, perceptible to every viewer, the "spirit of Minoan art," I am not speaking of something abstract and have no need to prove that it is present. "Spirit" is openness and expansion of vision, a primordial experience of man. Openness and expansion arise naturally from a gift peculiar to man. They can take a definite direction; this we call a spiritual or cultural trend. On the strength of an evident direction, we can determine a characteristic spirit, in this case a spirit oriented toward life and nature, stressing them, bringing them out, and setting them before the eye.

In the passage cited above, Platon connected the very marked spirit of Minoan art with a particular deity, the only deity who, it was safe to assume, was a very special object of worship to the Minoans: the Great Goddess. A reliable portrait of her on the peak of a mountain appears on a seal from Knossos [1].[3] In the background we discern a mountain sanctuary; and facing the goddess is a male figure looking up at her and greeting her. The mountain is flanked by two lions. It has not been possible to discover a Minoan name for the goddess, unless the Greek name already occurred among the Minoans. Her rela-

3 Fragmentary prints of this seal were preserved in the great palace under the remains of the "small Columnar Shrine," an edifice which, according to Evans' reconstruction, had a column in the middle (*Palace of Minos*, II, 804–10). In view of its situation it may be regarded as the central shrine of the entire palace.

tionship to wild nature was, however, as evident as that of a corresponding goddess in Greek mythology: Rhea, the Great Mother of the gods. The Great Goddess did not possess a significant cult site of her own on the Greek continent. At Knossos the foundations of her temple were shown to travelers in the Greek period.[4] These remains demonstrate that this divine figure lived on among the Greeks.

The correspondence between the worship of this goddess and the spirit of Minoan art provides Platon's characterization with its central idea, which Platon himself wished to express with a certain restraint. He did not wish to say openly—though under the impact of his over-all view he came very close to it—that the art of the Minoans bore witness to the omnipotence in Crete of a single deity, a Great Goddess, who is manifested with varying attributes in the monuments. For, though undeniable, this correspondence does not justify us in identifying the characteristic spirit of this art exclusively with a mother religion, with the cult of a single ruling goddess. From no ancient monuments is it possible to draw inferences that would exclude the presence of something that is not represented. "The struggle with death, a familiar theme in prehistoric cultures, is not here discernible," says Platon.[5] The struggle with death *was* represented on Mycenaean tombs, and it may be mere chance that tombstones with similar representations have not been found in the Minoan sphere. But ancient art was never unrestricted in its choice of subject matter. It is not possible to draw a dividing line between religious awe and artistic taste: the principle of selection may have been determined by both at once and not by religion alone.

4 Diodorus Siculus V 66 1; identified by Evans (*Palace of Minos*, II, 6–7) with the foundations of a Greek temple between the propylaia and the central courtyard of the palace of Knossos.

5 *A Guide*, p. 28.

Even if this art did not express everything, it was *all expression*: the expression of a characteristic relation to the world, which runs unchanging through the manifestations of Minoan art and religion. The Minoan artist saw the world primarily in its plant and animal aspects—and very differently from the Christian artist, or from the Greek artist of the Geometric period and on. The attention of the Christians and Greeks was focused on anthropomorphic, spiritual gods. Small wonder that the Cretan eye saw other gods; these gods were, in a manner of speaking, the spirits, or the divine spirit, of the world of plants and animals. The sea roundabout adorned the wonderful Minoan vases not with Nereids but with polyps and nautili, and the murals with dolphins and flying fishes. It is possible that the Minoans looked upon two giant polyps—a male and a female—as the epiphanies of the divine rulers of the watery depths. Their marriage may have been the precursor of the marriage between Poseidon and Amphitrite.[6] Votive offerings at the shrine of a goddess found near the present-day village of Piskokephalo in eastern Crete[7] show that a scarablike dusk beetle, *Rhinoceros oryctes*, announced and accompanied a divine *parousia*, the presence of a goddess.

The Minoan artists bring us to a world of plants and animals, in which gods, coming from the sky, appear on mountain tops, beneath flowers. What was their view of man?

6 J. Wiesner, "Die Hochzeit des Polypus," pp. 35–51.

7 S. Alexiou, *Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Heraclion*, p. 80 (case 123).

The Minoan Gesture

ONCE AGAIN let us consult a modern, objective observer, a woman who studied the art monuments of Greece and those of the Near East with like dedication and was open to their special language—the language of art. "Cretan civilization is unhistorical not only in the sense that the modern historian happens to be unable to write an articulate account of its past, a record in which events and personalities have name and character, but because it lacked the desire for monumental statement, pictorial or otherwise. We find no interest in single human achievement, no need to emphasize, to rescue its significance."[8] Still more important is the following observation: "Cretan art ignored the terrifying distance between the human and the transcendent which may tempt man to seek a refuge in abstraction and to create a form for the significant remote from space and time; it equally ignored the glory and futility of single human acts, time-bound, space-bound. In Crete artists did not give substance to the world of the dead through an abstract of the world of the living, nor did they immortalize proud deeds or state a humble claim for divine attention in the temples of the gods. Here and here alone [in contrast to Egypt and the Near East] the human bid for timelessness was disregarded in the most complete acceptance of the grace of life the world has ever known. For life means movement and the beauty of movement was woven in the intricate web of living forms which we call 'scenes of nature'; was revealed in human-bodies acting their serious games, inspired by a

8 H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement*, p. 186.

transcendent presence, acting in freedom and restraint, unpurposeful as cyclic time itself."[9]

Minoan art fully justifies this negative characterization–negative from the standpoint of man as the center, as the vehicle of his own historical and non-historical glory, but not from the standpoint of the deity, whose presence it demands and requires. Man is always on the edge of this epiphany of the spirit–the spirit or spirits of life and nature–if not face to face with it. In this view an intimation of the godhead could be manifested not only in a swarm of insects, in birds, or in the beasts of the sea, but also in a human gesture, and it could in turn determine man's gestures.

For in Minoan art man is never without gesture, although figures standing or sitting gestureless are known to us in the art of the ancient Orient and Greece. There are cult gestures everywhere, but it is something else again when gesture becomes an essential element, a characteristic, of the general view communicated by art. Here I am speaking not of cult gestures side by side with other equally characteristic gestures of simple human existence, but of *the* gesture which time and time again, in different forms of movement, represents the identical situation of man: his non-central position which demands an "opposite" and can be understood only as an "opposite."

This non-central position of man was confirmed by the deciphering of the Cretan writing. Even among the Mycenaeans, writing did not serve for self-perpetuation, for they too, for all their monumental edifices, scorned to put inscriptions on their tombs.[10] If, as the Mycenaeans most probably did,[11] the Minoans possessed an epic poetry that

9 Ibid., p. 216.
10 See Kerényi, *The Heroes of the Greeks*, pp. 8 f.
11 See Kerényi, "Im Nestor-palast von Pylos," *Werke*, II, 265.

complemented the statement of their art, it would not invalidate the testimony of the Minoan gesture that reveals man in a wholly religious situation: not oriented solely toward himself and his fellow men, but determined by something other, something outside himself, caught up in an atmosphere of festival as in an enchanted world.

The most dangerous of all Minoan gestures is to be seen in the bull game as represented in paintings and sculptured figures. Here the body is shown in free acrobatic movement. The player seizes the horns, lets himself be thrown upward by the bull, turns one or more somersaults in the air, and lands behind the animal which is running away [2].[12] The gesture grows out of the game, but game and body are a single indivisible gesture, free and at the same time controlled, which can well be said to have been "inspired by a transcendent presence." The bull game was a repetition of the original capture of the wild bull before the days of domestication [3A/3B].[13] From it developed the acrobatic art of the Minoan *toreros*. Such repetition and art require a religious inspiration, without which a festive game cannot come into being. For the Minoan bull game was clearly a festive game. In honor of whom? The Great Goddess of nature and life? Nikolaos Platon drew this inference from his interpretation of Minoan art.[14] In his view, the goddess was the divine onlooker, the "opposite," though this does not exclude the possibility of a divine presence in the game itself, especially

12 In this fresco from the small courtyard of the east wing of the palace of Knossos, three movements in the game are represented by three players, two girls and a young man, who execute the movements successively. An ivory figure reproduced in Marinatos and Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, pl. 97, also shows the movement.

13 The scene appears on the ivory box published by S. Alexiou in Ὑστερομινωικοὶ τάφοι λιμένος Κνώσου, figs. 30–33.

14 N. Platon, "Sir Arthur Evans and the Creto-Mycenaean Bullfights," p. 93.

in the bull, an exemplary manifestation of the deity in Crete. Not only the human onlookers but also the Minoan *toreros*, who risked their lives with an art never equaled by their Spanish successors, are mere marginal figures in the drama they are performing.

It is somewhat different with the dance, the most universal gesture, in which man is all gesture. On a Minoan cup from the oldest palace of Phaistos, two girls are seen dancing around a goddess who approaches a flower springing up from the ground [4];[15] in another, three women are dancing, the one in the middle being perhaps a goddess [5]. Other figures—all women—are visible on the rim or on the disk that forms the base of the vessel. They are probably not divine beings, but since those on the rim are bowing low, it cannot be doubted that this vessel too was used in the cult; it presupposes a "transcendent presence" in the dance itself. Inspired gesture raises man to the sphere of the gods and the dance does still more. In the dance, gods can be made present; the greatest deity can be drawn into the midst of the dancers. The two women of the first vase, standing on either side of the snake goddess, raising their hands in circular movements, and admiring the flower, are no less goddesses than the central figure. The dance figure unites gods and men on the same level.

In such dances, the distance between "opposites" is annulled. But elsewhere it is present: plainly so on the Knossos seal showing the Great Goddess on a mountain top, bare-bosomed and holding out her staff like a shepherd's crook over the heads of the lions which flank her [1]. The man who holds his hand before his forehead—to judge by his size he is a superhuman being—is greeting her. Here the distance is manifest: on one side is the epiphany, and on the other, the beholder.

15 See the explanation in Kerényi, *Eleusis*, pp. xix f.; and "Die Blume der Persephone," pp. 29 f.

This is the situation of a vision such as assuredly occurred in the world surrounding Minoan art. Such visions constituted a dimension above the visible dimensions of nature. The "Minoan gesture"—an element as characteristic of Minoan culture as the spirit of Minoan art—points to such a dimension.

Visionary Crete

IN ACCOUNTS of ancient religions too little attention has been paid to the visionary faculty.[16] Visionary power does not seem to have been equally distributed among men; it was more abundant in ancient times and has steadily become rarer. Historians of religion have as a rule tended to ignore it unless their attention was called to it by explicit testimony. We find such testimony in the statements of the mystics of all times. But since mystics are exceptions in all religions and since historians of religion have no visions, our thinking in this matter ordinarily revolves around these two extremes: the positive experience of the mystics and the negative experience of the historians of religion

16 F. Matz, in "Göttererscheinungen und Kultbild im minoischen Kreta," has devoted a thorough archaeological investigation to this phenomenon of the Minoan religion. His findings, which are in every way positive, are rendered unclear by his unfortunate choice of the term *Epiphanienglaube* ("epiphanic faith"). Visionary capacity produces not "epiphanic faith," but epiphanies, nor does it necessarily involve ecstasy. Matz exaggerates the importance in the Minoan religion of ecstasy, for which the monuments do not provide adequate support. According to him, "essential elements of the Dionysos religion are present in prehistoric Crete," but from the name "Dionysos" he draws inferences only for the Mycenaean Greeks and not for the Minoan culture. He did not succeed in clarifying the relationships. We arrived at our largely similar conclusions independently of one another.

and all present-day non-mystics. We find little explicit testimony concerning what lies between the two extremes, although without such intermediate phenomena—the light, hovering visions of persons of moderate visionary endowment—a religion possessed of a living mythology would be unthinkable.

An indication that men in general are capable of such visions is supplied, for example, by the Indian coming-of-age ritual, which required all youths to fast and remain in the woods until they saw visions. We may seem to have drawn on a source remote from our subject, but all cultures have the same human *nature* as their basis though all cultures do not take the same attitude toward the capacity for visions. In the accounts of the religions of the forest Indians of North America, we find detailed indications of the type of visions that were demanded. They were waking dreams, which were expected to be sharper, more intense, and more striking than the dreams of sleep. An authority on the American Indians writes: "Visions are held to be 'real'; they represent actual contact with the superhuman, whereas dreams do not necessarily do so." And he quotes a saying of the Indians: "In visions there is something sacred, less so in dreams."[17]

Homer may perfectly well have been thinking of visions of this kind when in the Odyssey he described the epiphanies of Artemis on high mountains: "She looked like Artemis, when bow in hand she comes down from the mountains, over lofty Taÿgetos or Erymanthos, to hunt the boars and fleet-footed deer: round about her the nymphs make sport, those daughters of Zeus who frequent her countryside; and her mother is proud indeed, for she lifts head and brow above all the troop, and she is pre-eminent where all are beautiful. So shone the fresh

17 W. Müller, *Die Religionen der Waldlandindianer Nordamerikas*, p. 57, citing Wm. Whitman, *The Oto*, p. 85.

young maiden among her girls."[18] The myth of the gods is divine epiphany in the medium of language. It is not localized in the same way as visions. It can be related wherever its language is spoken. A vision always has as its setting a definite place, the place where it occurred. Its explicit localization bears witness to the visionary character of the myth cited above. This localization is a heritage of vision in myth and in all the tales that embody it, that is, in mythology.

Vision and myth, epiphany and mythology, influenced and engendered one another and gave rise to cult images. But in man's relation to the gods, epiphany has a priority grounded in the immediacy of every true vision. Visions and language are equally fundamental, and both are presuppositions of the mythological tale. In Crete visions are especially important. Cretan mythology has not come down to us in its own language. What we know of it through the Greeks is very meager, although there were numerous small shrines in Minoan Crete. How numerous has become known only recently, and we are not yet able to establish sure correspondences between the few old Cretan names preserved by Greek mythology and the figures known to us from art. According to Greek mythology, the snake goddess and the two dancing girls around the flower on the Phaistos cup [4] can only be Persephone and two companions.[19] The exact correspondence, however, is a surprising novelty, which perhaps for that exact reason was not immediately noticed. For whom are we to take the man looking across at the goddess on the mountain top on the Knossos gem? He is experiencing an epiphany.

This is not, however, the only indication that the large island was especially conducive to visions. The ridges and peaks of the high Cretan

18 Odyssey VI 102–9 (W. H. D. Rouse translation, p. 71).
19 See note 15, above, and [1].

mountains, situated between the Aegean and Libyan seas, were an ideal scene for epiphanies: a world of light and a Minoan cult scene. The subterranean world, the world of caves, was also a place of the Minoan cult, which seems to have been practiced more on the heights and in the depths than in the great palaces. These palaces appear in certain respects to be the forerunners of the Greek temples, especially of those that exceeded the modest proportions of small sanctuaries. The palaces were characteristic of the style of Minoan culture and probably were sacred in their totality, though only certain rooms were employed in the cult and these were not always distinguished by a central or otherwise prominent position. With their complex structure and several stories, the palaces—this is evident at least at Knossos—seem to reproduce the Cretan cosmos, the true scene of the Minoan cult. On the upper floors we find several rooms each with a single round column in the center, a column broadening toward the top, as—to cite a simple example—in the so-called temple tomb near the palace of Knossos. The religious implications of this column cannot be doubted, and indeed it presents an obvious analogy to a mythical view of the heavens.[20] Such cult rooms both in the palace and in the tomb correspond to other cult rooms with posts in the middle; the column above is, as it were, a continuation of the post. The dividing line can be drawn between the upper and lower rooms, between column and pillar, corresponding to the imaginary line that divides the cosmos of the Cretans into a higher and lower cult world.

We must also look into the inside of Cretan nature, into some of the many limestone caves that make up the lower world. They seem to

20 Kerényi and Sichtermann, "Zeitlose Schieferbauten der Insel Andros," pp. 33 f.; Kerényi, "Die andriotische Säule," *Werke*, III. According to Evans (note 3, above), the small central shrine of the palace of Knossos shows the same type.

be innumerable. More than three hundred have already been explored[21] in addition to those cult grottoes that have become famous. It is certain that the accidental human forms of the stalactites and stalagmites not only aroused the imagination of the ancients as they do of modern archaeologists, but also inspired visions that transformed the stalactite formations into divine figures. It cannot be established with certainty what those who visited Eileithyia in her cave near Amnisos, the harbor of Knossos, thought they saw there; but whatever they saw, they repeated the vision that had made the stalagmites into objects of the goddess' cult.

By the name Eileithyia, which the Odyssey mentions in connection with this grotto, the Greeks designated a goddess who presided over births and who presumably governed everything connected with the life of women even more in Minoan than in Greek times. A cult site of this goddess was a place dedicated to the origin of life. Two round enclosures are built into the cave. In front of them a very low stalagmite shaped like a navel might be regarded as a kind of altar. In the first enclosure stands a stalagmite suggesting two goddesses joined at the back [6].[22] The archaic art of Crete also bears witness to a dual Eileithyia.[23] In the second, inner, and more important enclosure there

21 See P. Faure, *Fonctions des cavernes crétoises*.

22 [6] is after Faure, *Fonctions*, pl. VII 5. / I speak from firsthand observation, supported by S. Marinatos' report of his excavation, "Τὸ σπέος τῆς Εἰλειθυίας," pp. 100 f. Other "interpretations" are those of N. Platon, "Περὶ τῆς ἐν Κρήτηι λατρείας τῶν σταλακτίτων," pp. 164 ff.; and Faure, *Fonctions*, p. 84. They are utterly free—as though there had been no myth to guide and determine the artist's imagination.

23 See, for example, the ivory relief in the Cretan style of the seventh century, in New York, published by G. Richter, "An Ivory Relief in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," pp. 261 ff. F. Matz came closest to the right interpretation in "Arge und Opis," pp. 1 ff. One of the two women is "released" and therefore

rises a solitary stalagmite. Phalli do not appear in Minoan works of high artistry. Here is one provided by nature. A masculine cult object is unmistakably present in the midst of this feminine sanctuary. Such emphasis on a natural phenomenon suggests insight and recognition among the visitors, whose visionary power no doubt helped to make the cave into a cult site. Statuettes—now in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion—of mating couples from the cave sanctuary of Inatos on the southern coast of Crete leave no doubt as to the extreme concreteness of the Cretan view of the origin of life.

The heights, which stimulated the visionary power in a different way and in a still higher degree, also had their numerous sanctuaries, which we must include in our view of Cretan nature if we wish to form a conception of the island in the Minoan period. Before the erection of buildings, these sites of vision and worship were probably unmarked or marked only with stones. The list of mountain sites where traces of sanctuaries have been found has grown impressively.[24] It will grow still longer when the almost inaccessible mountain country of western Crete has been explored. Shrines that were built in such places are visible in works of art. The Knossos seal [1] showing the epiphany of the Great Goddess on the mountain top has a simplified picture of a temple corresponding to the human figure looking upward on the same plane. Thus, we know of these mountain shrines not only from the vestiges that have been preserved but from naturalistic rep-

---

"releasing"; the other is "bound" and therefore "binding." They represent the two aspects of the goddess of childbearing. This reliably identifies the two figures as Eileithyia. Matz and others give her wrong names.

24 According to the compendious report of P. Faure, "Cavernes et sites aux deux extrémités de la Crète," pp. 493 ff.; and N. Platon, Τὸ Ἱερὸν Μαζᾶ καὶ τὰ μινωικὰ Ἱερὰ Κορυφῆς," pp. 119 ff.

resentations in works of art. On a Minoan vase [7][25] a man sets a basket with sacrificial offerings down on a round rock in front of a shrine. To what unbelievable heights these offerings had to be carried is clearly shown. The woods are on the slopes below. The holy site hovers amid the crags above the tree line. The most perfect representation [8][26] of such a shrine shows how, in the absence of people, it is occupied by the *agrimi*, the wild mountain goats of Crete, and by birds of prey.

Transcendence in Nature

THE MINOAN gesture presupposes the possibility of epiphanies produced and made credible by a visionary capacity. The gesture brings transcendence into nature. Cretan nature itself promoted the visionary capacity, and assuredly not only on the heights and in the depths. It would be a mistake to suppose that country sanctuaries existed only on mountain peaks. The visionary capacity was also stimulated and satisfied by Minoan art, which provoked a preliminary state, followed by another in which transcendence was induced by more violent means.

How a gesture can open up the dimension of vision as an additional dimension of nature is shown by a drawing on a small amphora from the oldest palace of Phaistos [9].[27] Two figures with upraised hands appear among crocuses. They are characterized only by this gesture. We may justifiably call them male gesture figures; to us they are nothing else. This gesture is well known to us from ancient Oriental art as

25 Published by S. Alexiou, Νέα παράστασις λατρείας ἐπὶ μινωϊκοῦ ἀναγλύφου ἀγγείου, pp. 346 ff.

26 Published by N. Platon, "Kato Zakros," p. 174, fig. 187.

27 Published by D. Levi, "Attività della Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene nell'anno 1955," p. 254, fig. 33.

a gesture of worship.[28] Who is being worshiped? What god has appeared to these figures? Or are the gesture figures themselves gods? An epiphany is enacted in a field of crocuses which to us evokes no name. For the Minoans it was a very different matter: to them this epiphany was familiar. They recognized it, either in the gesture figures or in some larger figure, whose worshipers or perhaps companions were these little male beings.

A true gesture is always an excerpt; its representation is an instant view of a movement. Minoan art succeeded in combining hints of transcendence with the utmost naturalness in representing scenes whose character is unmistakable. The seal disk of a golden ring from Isopata near Knossos shows a scene full of musical movement [10]. The movement starts from above, from the dimension of divine epiphanies. An epiphany occurs among flowers. Two snakes strangely animate the background; they are situated so high up that conceivably they belong to the divine world. A single great eye, somewhat lower down than the snakes—the eye of an observer from another, more likely lower than upper, world—lends the whole image a special depth. Someone is looking on. Two of the four large female figures are epiphanies of goddesses. A small, fifth, female figure, hovering in the air behind the four larger ones, indicates that they come from an upper region. She raises one hand, while the goddess striding before her, as though descending in a spiral, raises both hands. This is the gesture of epiphany. It is answered by the upraised hands of the remaining two large female figures. It would be inadequate to call this a gesture of worship. Their gesture is an answer not only to the epiphany, but to the gesture of epiphany.

Unlike the gestures of ritual, from which original vision is absent,

28 S. Alexiou, 'Η μινωϊκὴ θεὰ μεθ' ὑψωμένων χειρῶν, pp. 250 ff.

the gestures in the visionary experience of an epiphany are authentic, not repeated gestures. In the representations they are not always quite the same, and their meaning is not always quite clear. On a gold ring from Knossos[29] a woman with her hand half-open greets a small male apparition which floats down from a country sanctuary [11].[30] On another ring two female figures greet each other with upraised hands [12]. One figure is nude, half-kneeling before a column indicating the sanctuary; the other, clothed, is arriving. Perhaps this latter figure with her dog or baboon is appearing to the other. If both women were goddesses, the epiphany gesture of the one and the responding gesture of the other were gestures of mutual greeting, and Cretan mythology has preserved the gestures. To us it is a mythology of images that speak for themselves. Thus, the faience statuettes from the palace of Knossos—female figures with bare breasts and outstretched or half-raised outspread hands bearing snakes, which in some cases are coiled around an arm [13, 14]—leave no room for doubt. It is uncertain only whether they represent a priestess or a goddess. By the gesture we recognize not the representative but the divinity. "Thus do I appear," says the gesture.

Artificially Induced Transcendence

THE FEMALE idols of the Late Minoan period are rigid, but with their upraised hands they say the same thing as the statuettes from Knossos. They bear witness to the fact that vision and epiphany, an additional dimension amplifying the world of nature, were still a need of the

29 From the subterranean treasure rooms which may have contained the objects from the main chapel of the palace of Knossos.

30 [11] is after V. E. G. Kenna, *Cretan Seals*, pl. X 250.

Cretans at a time when not only their artistic ability but also their visionary capacity had dwindled. The human nature in which this need was rooted cannot have changed very appreciably. The artistic decadence revealed by clay statues of this type is unmistakable. They are busts of extremely primitive workmanship on bell-shaped bases. Five such statuettes were found in a country sanctuary near the village of Gazi west of Heraklion.[31] On their heads they bear various attributes showing what goddess was intended.

The largest of these five female idols with epiphany gestures bears three poppy heads as head ornament and attribute. The stems are inserted behind her diadem [15].[32] The clay tablets that have been deciphered testify to the fact that poppies were widely cultivated both on Crete and in Pylos in the Late Minoan period. The use of the poppy head as an ideogram in these account books leaves no room for doubt. The yield of poppies mentioned is so enormous that students long suspected that the figures referred to grain rather than poppies.[33] Here we must take note of a little-known feature of Minoan culture, at least in its late period.

> *For the Greeks Demeter was still a poppy goddess,*
> *Bearing sheaves and poppies in both hands.*[34]

If in the Linear B script her name signified "poppy fields," conclusions must be drawn regarding the food of the Cretans. Poppy seed with honey is highly nutritious and not narcotic. In ancient as in modern Greece, poppy-seed cakes were baked on festive occasions.[35] Poppy

31 S. Alexiou, Ἡ μινωϊκὴ θεὰ μεθ' ὑψωμένων χειρῶν, pp. 188 ff.
32 The height of the statuette is 77.5 cm.
33 Ventris and Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, p. 35.
34 Theokritos VII 157.
35 Athenaios XIV 648 A; K. I. Kakoure, *Death and Resurrection*, p. 31.

heads appear among the symbols pointing to the Eleusinian Mysteries[36] or at least to the preparations for them. The ears of grain which in abbreviated form expressed the attained goal of the Mysteries are just as much in evidence. Nothing in the tradition suggests that the poppy had held as profound a significance in Eleusis as the grain. Still, the poppy may have performed a similar function, for example, that of evoking the image of the queen of the underworld. Nor is its use in the Eleusinian cakes, if not in the Eleusinian potion, the *kykeon*, to be excluded. This is uncertain. It seems probable that the Great Mother Goddess, who bore the names Rhea and Demeter, brought the poppy with her from her Cretan cult to Eleusis, and it is certain that in the Cretan cult sphere, opium was prepared from poppies.

The making of opium from poppies requires a special procedure. A pharmacobotanist discovered that the poppies on the head of the goddess figurine found in Gazi [15] reveal incisions which the artist colored more deeply than the rest of the flower to make them plainly visible.[37] This is a most significant discovery, because opium is obtained through such incisions. The coloring of the incisions was a way of displaying one of the goddess' gifts to her worshipers. They were reminded of experiences that they owed to her. This is concrete evidence that should not be blurred by vague reference to "medicines" (*pharmaka*) or to an unspecified ecstasy connected with the gifts of this goddess. What she bestowed through opium cannot have been essentially different in the Late Minoan period from today. What was it?

Here we find ourselves in the realm of pharmacological experience, and a large body of literature to which this specific experience has

36 See Kerényi, *Eleusis*, pp. 55, 74 f., 142 f., 184.

37 P. G. Kritikos and S. P. Papadaki, "The History of the Poppy and of Opium," p. 23.

given rise in recent times is at our disposal. This literature is far from unequivocal. The dosage, the mixture, and the form in which opium is taken can vary exceedingly, as can the mental states of those who have taken it, the reliability of their accounts, and the value of reports by outside observers. Nevertheless, some of these accounts seem significant in view of the archaeological observations disclosing a visionary element in the monuments of the Minoan religion. Opium induces much more than just sleep and dreams. The Greeks related that the Cretan Epimenides slept in a cave for fifty-seven years and thereby became a philosopher. They looked upon his wisdom as a miracle, not as an artificially induced state.[38] If this legend preserves a memory of the Late Minoan consumption of opium, it also shows that the knowledge of the actual effect of the *pharmakon* vanished with the Minoan culture. The Odyssey (IV 220) speaks of an Egyptian *pharmakon* against suffering and anger. Its effect seems comparable to the great euphoria that is an initial effect of opium; there is no mention of sleep.

Thus, we may turn to the modern classics on opium, from which I shall cite a few of the passages least conditioned by our own culture and closest to the atmosphere of Minoan art. "The ocean with its eternal breathing, on which however a great stillness brooded, symbolized my mind and the mood that then governed it . . . a festive peace. Here . . . all unrest gave way to a halcyon serenity."[39] These are De Quincey's words, quoted by Baudelaire. Baudelaire himself, in "Le Poison" (*Les Fleurs de Mal*), speaks of extending, not shattering, the limits of nature:

38 Diogenes Laertius I 109.

39 C. Baudelaire, *Les Paradis artificiels*, pp. 119–20: "L'Océan, avec sa respiration éternelle, mais couvé par un vaste calme, personnifiait mon esprit et l'influence qui le gouvernait alors . . . un repos ferie . . . et cependant toutes les inquiétudes étaient aplanies par un calme alcyonien."

Opium enlarges the boundless,
Extends the unlimited,
Gives greater depth to time . . .[40]

Others, however, have spoken of a "world in which 'one can hear the walk of an insect on the ground, the bruising of a flower.' "[41] According to Cocteau, "opium is the only vegetable substance that communicates the vegetable state to us."[42]

It may be presumed that toward the end of the Late Minoan period, opium stimulated the visionary faculty and aroused visions which had earlier been obtained without opium. For a time, an artificially induced experience of transcendence in nature was able to replace the original experience. In the history of religions, periods of "strong medicine" usually occur when the simpler methods no longer suffice.[43] This development may be observed among the North American Indians. Originally mere fasting sufficed to induce visions. It was only in the decadent period of Indian culture that recourse was taken to peyotl, or mescalin. Earlier it was unnecessary.[44] This powerful drug had not always been an element in the style of Indian life, but it helped to maintain this style.

The same was true of opium in the Late Minoan period. It was

40 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, XLIX, 6–8 (*Oeuvres complètes*, I, 80).

41 See E. Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan*, pp. 41 and 312–13, note 27, citing M. H. Abrams, *The Milk of Paradise* (pp. 4, 63).

42 J. Cocteau, "L'Opium," *Oeuvres complètes*, X, 113: "L'opium est la seule substance végétale qui nous communique l'état végétal"—or at least what the French poet understands by "vegetable state."

43 Kerényi, "Mescalin-Perioden der Religionsgeschichte," pp. 201–203.

44 See C. Mellen, "Reflections of a Peyote Eater," p. 65: "At the very moment when the entire traditional fabric of the tribe was rendered useless [after defeat by the United States in the Indian Wars of the 1870's] peyote was first used."

(continued...)

INDEX

A superior figure following a page number indicates a footnote. A number followed by an asterisk indicates an illustration in the section after page 388.

H

I

T

W

Y

Z

Index by Delight Ansley